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Summary record of the 20th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Kuchinsky ..... (Ukraine)
later: Ms. Kusangbor (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Ghana)

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04-56458 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Agenda item 98: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/C.3/59/L.24)

Draft resolution A/C.3/59/L.24: Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system

1. **Ms. Ryan** (Australia), introducing the draft resolution also on behalf of Canada and New Zealand, noted that the goal of achieving overall gender equity in the United Nations system by 2000 had not been met. Progress had been uneven and, at the current rate, the issue would remain a challenge for some years.

2. An effort had been made to streamline the text, while reaffirming the recommendations of previous years; but the shorter text did not indicate decreased interest in the issue; rather it emphasized the key areas that needed further improvement. In future, the draft resolution would be submitted biennially and other delegations were urged to consider adopting a similar approach when submitting draft resolutions to the Third Committee.

3. She announced that Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Israel, Liechtenstein, Mongolia, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Slovakia, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkey and Uruguay had joined the sponsors.

Agenda item 101: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/59/41 and Corr.1, A/59/184-S/2004/602, A/59/190, 274 and 331)

4. **Ms. Al-Saleh** (Oman) said that over 55 per cent of Omanis were under 19 years of age and Oman had devoted significant efforts to the development of that group. Measures had been adopted to provide a protective legal environment and adapt national standards to the international treaties to which it was party.

5. Oman had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996 and the two optional protocols in 2004; it was now preparing its first periodic report on implementation of the Convention. In 2001 it had ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 and the accompanying recommendation No. 190 of 1999, both related to prohibition of the worst forms of child labour, and, in 2003 it had adopted a new labour law prohibiting the employment of children under 15 years of age and protecting those under 18 years of age from excessive or evening work. That same year, the World Health Organization had recognized that Oman had the largest absolute reduction in under-five mortality; moreover, health indicators for child survival were excellent. Primary-school enrolment was over 90 per cent for both boys and girls, with a negligible gender gap, and the first juvenile-justice law was being drafted.

6. In 2003 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its government counterparts had established a plan of action addressing issues related to adolescents, such as the promotion of healthy lifestyles, the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the increased participation of young people in national development.

7. Although malnutrition was still high among children in the under-five age group, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF were working to reduce it. Also, access to pre-school education was limited to about 10 per cent of children and, there too, UNICEF was working with the Ministry of Education to ensure increased access and quality.

8. Oman had embarked on a path towards economic modernization and child development founded on Islamic beliefs and values. Future planning for children had to take into account the entire range of human rights encompassed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Omani laws and values, beyond merely achieving survival. The significance of the technical support provided by the United Nations — and specifically the UNICEF country office in Oman — could not be overemphasized.

9. **Mr. Zhalgasbayev** (Kazakhstan) said that protection of the rights and interests of children was a priority in the national policy of Kazakhstan. There were more than 5 million children in the country, each of whom had the right to nurture and support. His country had strengthened its legal framework for the protection of children and the cooperation between its national mechanisms for children and international organizations. With support from UNICEF, a national working group composed of government departments and NGOs had met to set priorities in programmes for children.

10. The recent stabilization in the economy had led to an improvement in the situation of children. In 2000,

the birth rate had risen and the mortality rate had stabilized. The Government was providing assistance to over 600,000 children from low-income families. Kazakhstan had also ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 on child labour and the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It had developed an educational-reform plan for the period through 2015, with particular emphasis on quality. A number of programmes to improve infant and child mortality rates, immunization and safe motherhood had also been established.

11. He hoped that the United Nations system, especially UNICEF, would maintain its commitment to cooperate with and support national efforts for the protection and welfare of children.

12. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her country's national plans reflected its concern with children's issues. It had formed a committee to monitor its compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its implementation of the recommendations made at the General Assembly's special session on children. Her country's efforts to improve the conditions of children, including free education and health services, had led to a reduction in infant mortality, a rise in school attendance and a decline in school dropout rates.

13. Her country's plans for children to 2015 covered health, education, protection against physical harm, violence, and exploitation, and children with special needs. In February 2004, a national conference had recommended establishing a mechanism to monitor the implementation of child-protection legislation.

14. The Syrian Arab Republic had ratified the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182, concerning child labour. Syria had also taken part in the Third Arab High-Level Conference on the Rights of the Child, held in Tunisia earlier in 2004. Syrian legislation contained provisions for protecting children from harm, violence, or other forms of cruel, or degrading treatment.

15. Referring to the Secretary-General's comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict (A/59/331), she said her delegation looked forward to the results. Moreover, it was essential to avoid double standards when dealing with children involved in armed conflict and under foreign occupation.

16. The Syrian Arab Republic could not address the problems of all its children since thousands of them had lived under Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights since 1967 and suffered the oppressive practices of the occupation authorities. Those included closing schools, banning Syrian books and curricula, imposing Israeli curricula, and forcing Israeli citizenship upon them in an attempt to eliminate the sense of national belonging. Indeed, Israeli practices of property seizure and mass expulsion extended to all occupied Arab territories, as was demonstrated by the plight of Palestinian children and the violations of their rights to life and freedom. Syria hoped the Secretary-General's forthcoming study on violence against children would address the suffering of Syrian children in the Golan Heights.

17. **Mr. Kazem** (Iraq) said that Iraqi children were the group most seriously affected by the policies of the previous regime, the wars it had waged and the economic embargo, which had led to the death of more than a million Iraqi people, most of them children. The *Human Development Report 2003* of the United Nations Development Programme had reported a death rate among children of 135 per 1,000 in the 1990s as a result of disease and malnutrition. The exceptional circumstances in the new Iraq had given rise to previously unknown phenomenon such as homeless children, social fragmentation, a rise in the divorce rate and an all-round fall in standards of education and health.

18. The competent institutions had taken effective steps to address the situation, such as the repeal of Revolution Command Council's decision of 1984 which permitted the employment of children under legal age; they had also activated the child-care agency and opened special institutions to treat traumatized children and train health and social workers. Many institutions and children's homes had been restored so that homeless children and orphans could be cared for and provided with an education, and the coverage of the Social Welfare Act had been broadened, to the benefit of over 100,000 families.

19. Despite the challenges it was facing, Iraq was working tirelessly to put into effect the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He called on all humanitarian organizations concerned with children, in particular UNICEF, to assist in the

construction and restoration of institutions for children whose social integration, health and education were suffering. Iraqi children deserved a better future.

20. **Ms. Balanon** (Philippines) said that the Philippines continued to implement its strategic framework for the development of children, which aimed to safeguard and promote Filipino children through focused interventions at various critical stages of their development. It included priority goals and strategies for action at the national and local levels of government to be implemented in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and private entities.

21. One of the major challenges in ensuring a world fit for children was to address the situation of children in especially difficult conditions. While norms for efforts related to child survival were clear, guidelines and coordination related to child protection had not been developed sufficiently. The Philippines had established task forces to address specific protection issues, such as the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, the eradication of the sexual exploitation of children, and the protection of children from all forms of neglect, abuse, exploitation and discrimination.

22. The situation of children in armed conflict throughout the world required immediate action. The report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict (A/59/331) underscored the fact that more needed to be done. The application of standards and norms to protect children in armed conflict should be underpinned by a constructive approach that helped Member States address the situation of children in their own regions. The work of the different bodies of the United Nations system that had a role in ensuring the safety, welfare and development of children should be geared towards cooperating with Governments so as to support, complement and improve existing national policies and action plans. Since conflict situations differed, strategies to protect children caught up in such situations needed to be developed on a case-by-case basis.

23. **Ms. Kalay-Kleitman** (Israel) said that Israel took its commitment to children very seriously. There had been a shift in the paradigm of thought on children's rights in recent years and Israel had embraced it. Children were seen no longer as objects but as subjects and bearers of rights, and the protection of those rights was crucial for building free and forward-looking societies. The connection between children's rights and human rights had been strengthened and, as a result, the voices of Israeli children had become increasingly important.

24. In seeking to advance children's rights, the Government worked in close cooperation with many NGOs. Civil society was keenly aware of worldwide developments in the area of children's rights and worked hard to ensure that they were reflected within Israel.

25. Israel's undertaking to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child had gone well beyond merely legislating on the general principles concerning children and the law. It had established a committee to formulate a comprehensive plan for the systematic incorporation of the Convention into law; however, the committee had chosen to enlarge the scope of its mandate in order to bring about fundamental change in the status of children in Israeli society. Israel was now striving to implement its detailed recommendations. One of them sought to promote equality among children from different sectors of the population while respecting their cultural differences.

26. Israel commended the statement by the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF concerning the drafting of international guidelines on children without parental care. Such children were at particular risk and it was necessary to develop guiding principles and methodologies to aid them; however, increased attention should be given to all children at risk. One in every six Israeli children was at risk of abuse or neglect. One project being implemented aimed to reduce the number of children and youth at risk by developing programmes to strengthen families, schools and communities and to improve the lives of children and their families by early intervention with a broader array of better-coordinated services. The vision was to create opportunities for children and families at risk within the community and to help society foster their ability to flourish. That vision was shared by the Government and included in many of its initiatives.

27. Israel was a signatory to the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations

Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and planned to ratify them in the near future.

28. **Mr. Konfourou** (Mali) said that, in its efforts to honour the commitments it had made at the special session of the General Assembly on children, Mali had taken a range of measures at the national, regional and international levels aimed at strengthening the protection and well-being of children. At the national level, government actions included human rights education, the protection of especially vulnerable children, efforts to combat child poverty and cross-border trafficking in children, and measures to assist adolescents. At the regional level, Mali had signed cooperation agreements on cross-border trafficking in children with Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, and was negotiating similar agreements with Senegal and Guinea.

29. Despite that progress, however, parental authority had been undermined in his country by the erosion of traditional education, the disintegration of the family and the fall in purchasing power. As a result, many children had taken to the streets, becoming vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. His Government had taken a number of steps to address that situation, together with civil society, international organizations and the private sector. In that regard, Mali placed a great deal of hope in the cooperation programme set up with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the period 2003-2007. With respect to the tragic plight of child soldiers, the international community should introduce mo restrictive instruments to put an end to forced conscription and the use of children as instruments or victims of conflicts. The Human Security Network, of which Mali was a member, had included the issue of children and armed conflict among its medium-term priorities. Existing mechanisms would be used to educate people on the need to halt the use of children in armed conflicts. However, monitoring must be strengthened, early-warning systems introduced, and measures to suppress violence against children implemented. The Network would also help disseminate laws on children and armed conflict and promote ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

30. *Ms. Kusorgbor (Ghana), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

31. **Mr. Gadhavi** (India) said that, during its consideration of his country's second periodic report earlier in 2004, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had welcomed the many activities undertaken in India, at both federal and state levels, to implement the Convention, and had acknowledged that India's large population and high birth rate were obstacles to the full implementation of the Convention. His Government had adopted a national charter for children in February 2004 and had also submitted to Parliament a bill to create a national commission for children which would protect children's rights and investigate violations of those rights. India had fully supported the efforts of the international community to address the situation of children's rights around the world. And yet, the Secretary-General's report on progress achieved in realizing the commitments of the special session (A/59/274) indicated mixed results. The report rightly noted that efforts to improve the lives of the world's children required truly sustained development and the mobilization of additional resources.

32. His delegation had not yet been able to undertake a detailed review of the Secretary-General's comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict (A/59/331), owing to its delayed availability. However, he wished to offer certain preliminary observations. The assessment was certainly an indictment of the way the United Nations system addressed the plight of children affected by poverty, but it was more an indictment of how the United Nations system as a whole functioned. The study should have been based, not on the 1996 Machel report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), but on General Assembly resolution 51/77, which established the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and represented the first time that the United Nations had assessed its response to the issue.

33. The report noted the ineffectiveness of voluntary funding, and that was a matter of crucial importance. It also raised questions about the effectiveness of oversight by Member States, and argued that individual mechanisms, such as the Office of the Special Representative, could not adequately address the issue of children and armed conflict. With respect to the latter point, he noted that in other forums the case was often made that individual mechanisms were more effective than multi-agency mechanisms. Member

States should take steps to resolve that contradiction. Lastly, the report made recommendations regarding the staffing of the Office of the Special Representative, and Member States must consider those recommendations carefully. With respect to the issue of monitoring, he said that the views expressed previously by his delegation did not appear to have been taken into account in the recommendations. He wished to reiterate that Member States should strive for increasing efficiency, cost-effectiveness and impact when addressing the question of protecting children from the effects of armed conflict.

34. **Ms. Pires** (Cape Verde) said that the international community had made great efforts to protect children's rights since the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action at the World Summit for Children, and she welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the special session on children (A/59/274). However, children's basic human rights continued to be violated, and the international community must live up to its commitments. Her Government was profoundly concerned at the plight of children involved in armed conflicts. It had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two optional protocols, and had joined in adopting the Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. At the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it had introduced major legislative reforms. The recently approved Penal Code provided severe penalties for the abuse of minors. The National Commission for Human Rights had been created in 2001 in an effort to increase accountability in the implementation of all human rights instruments.

35. Despite a number of constraints, such as limited natural resources and continued high unemployment and poverty, Cape Verde had made great efforts to improve the lives of its children. Access to education had been improved, especially for girls from disadvantaged families, and infant mortality had fallen. Moreover, the Ministry of Education had created a children's parliament. Despite that progress, however, children still faced problems, and her Government was working hard to address them, with the support of domestic agencies and international partners.

36. **Mr. Nsemi** (Congo) noted that many countries had made great efforts either to translate the commitments made at the special session on children into plans of action. However, those achievements should not be allowed to obscure the critical situation of the world's children, in developing countries in particular, and the international community should redouble its efforts. The Congo had made major advances in recent years in the protection and promotion of children's rights. It had created a Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as an inter-ministerial committee to promote the Convention and a unit responsible for gathering, analysing and publishing data concerning the situation of children. Furthermore, the Government had adopted a National Plan of Action for Children in line with the recommendations of the World Summit. It had also created a children's parliament, with UNICEF support.

37. With respect to the question of children and armed conflict, his delegation supported the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and welcomed United Nations efforts to introduce new instruments and new standards for the protection of children. It also welcomed the Secretary-General's assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict (A/59/331), and took note of his recommendations regarding the need for an effective monitoring system, enhanced mainstreaming of concerns relating to such children, and more effective coordination across the United Nations system.

38. In accordance with the 1997 Ottawa Convention prohibiting the use of anti-personnel mines, the Congo had destroyed more than 5,000 anti-personnel mines in an effort to improve the lives of future generations, and wished to thank Canada and the United Nations for the financial and technical assistance they had provided. As the Secretary-General noted in his report (A/59/274), most of the goals in the Plan of Action of the special session would only be achieved if the international community redoubled its efforts. Improvement in the situation of children depended on improvement in the socio-economic condition of States, particularly in the developing world. The Congo wished to associate itself with the many calls for increased international cooperation in efforts to realize the commitments of the special session and to implement the Millennium Development Goals.

39. **Ms. Londoño** (Colombia) said that the strengthening of institutions and the rule of law was the main guarantee of the protection of individual rights, including the rights of children. The promotion and protection of children was valuable in itself, and therefore political considerations should be left aside

when dealing with their needs. Coordination within the United Nations system in support of government programmes and policies to benefit children was very important to their success. For example, 21 United Nations agencies were working in Colombia, and unless they coordinated their efforts among themselves and with the Government, programmes for the benefit of children would be lost amid the bureaucracy. UNICEF programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers were of interest, and those countries where recruitment of children had occurred could share their experience.

40. Turning to the Secretary-General's comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict (A/59/331), she said that, in the view of her delegation, States should be consulted at every stage of the proposed establishment of a monitoring and reporting system on child-rights violations; no mechanism could operate effectively without their active participation. Moreover, in addition to strengthening its cooperation with civil society, the United Nations should also strengthen its ties with the relevant national institutions; that point was not brought out in the report.

41. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that her delegation agreed with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict that it was time to move into an "era of application". An adequate monitoring and reporting mechanism on the situation of children affected by war was needed in order to improve the capacity to ensure compliance with international standards and commitments undertaken by parties to armed conflict. She also requested that his next report should address the situation of children living under occupation. Developments in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel should remain of deep concern to the international community because of their grave impact on children caught up in the conflict. They must be spared the risk of injury, trauma, displacement, family separation and loss of social services.

42. Jordan viewed education as a major tool for empowerment, and through the Jordan Education Initiative, a public-private partnership, it was exploring educational reform that would incorporate information and communications technology into the learning process. Furthermore, it considered human rights education essential for the creation of a just society and the establishment of peace and democracy and had given it a central focus in its education policy. It therefore welcomed the recommendation to proclaim a second Decade for Human Rights Education. It had also embraced the concept of early childhood education as a crucial investment in the holistic development of children, and had established a national strategy targeting that age group. In 2002, Jordan had ranked 35 out of 165 countries evaluated in the area of early childhood development. Together, children under age 15 and youths in the 15-24 age group made up about 70 per cent of the population, and therefore their well-being was of utmost importance for the Government.

43. **Mr. Pato** (Togo) noted from the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the special session on children (A/59/274) that progress had been made in the elaboration of national plans of action for children. However, much remained to be done: many children still suffered the effects of armed conflict, hunger and thirst; many others would die before age five because the international community had not done what was necessary to protect them from HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

44. In Togo, nearly half of the population was under the age of 15, and therefore the Government had made the needs of children a priority. Programmes for their protection were part of the national poverty reduction strategy, which included plans for universal primary education and reduction of infant mortality. However, the situation of children had become even more difficult with the suspension of aid from the European Union.

45. Trafficking in children between cities in Africa and Europe was growing, and his Government had taken a number of preventive measures accompanied by media campaigns to raise awareness. It had also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The number of orphans caused by HIV/AIDS had also continued to grow, and the Government had developed mechanisms for their care. Education for all children was a high priority, and the school enrolment rate was currently close to 80 per cent. Literacy and vocational training centres had been established to accommodate girls excluded from the school system. Maternal and child health was also on the list of government priorities for action.

46. Despite his Government's efforts to provide a more secure world for its children, resources were severely lacking. He urgently appealed to the international community and to donors to offer more support.

47. **Mr. Husain** (Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)) said that children had the natural right to live and grow in a safe and morally stable family environment, and Governments had the duty and the challenge to frame policies and laws to enable them to realize that God-given right. International, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations therefore had important roles to play in that regard. He shared the view of the Secretary-General that building a world fit for children would be a major step in fulfilling the commitments made in the Millennium Development Goals, seven of which directly and indirectly influenced the rights and interests of children.

48. The Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers intended to convene a ministerial conference on the child and social affairs to review the status of implementation of the Plan of Action adopted at the special session of the General Assembly. That document had placed special emphasis on the terrifying effects of armed conflict on children. He reiterated the resolve of OIC to work with the United Nations system and NGOs to aid Governments in providing humanitarian relief to the children victimized by armed conflict in such areas as Kashmir, Palestine, Sierra Leone and the Syrian Golan.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.